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Absenteeism and non-participative attitude among MPs are common

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THE issue of absenteeism among Members of Parliament and those sleeping during Dewan Rakyat sittings is not new.

It has been discussed at great length by many and has caught the attention of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on numerous occasions.

The media has highlighted the issue, and columnists had also commented on the absenteeism, those nodding away and those who simply make up the numbers.

Much has also been said about the responsibilities bestowed on the MPs by the electorate who had entrusted them to raise issues that concerned them.

And yet, one still reads in newspapers about MPs missing from Parliament and others who do not raise any issue or hardly contribute to the debates.

MPs should know that being present in the Dewan Rakyat is not enough.

Their voices must be heard, they must make their stand. They owe it to the people who put them there.

When the current Parliament session began on Oct 16, Dr Mahathir had met with the Barisan Nasional MPs and warned them.

Dr Mahathir said Barisan Nasional MPs who were frequently absent from Dewan Rakyat sittings may not be considered for the next general election.

He said attendance at Parliament sittings would be taken into account when the list of candidates for the general election was being prepared.

Had this warning had any effect on the errant BN MPs?

Backbenchers' Club president Datuk Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis said the warning was appropriate as MPs represented the people and they had to be serious in carrying out their duties.

"People have given us the responsibility to carry out certain tasks on their behalf.

"Therefore we must carry out our responsibilities. We are the voice of the people and there is nothing we can do for them if we are not present in Parliament."

For those MPs who have a proven track record, and they form the majority, it is just a matter of keeping it up.

It would not be too difficult for those MPs like Datuk Husni Hanadzlah from Tambun, Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (Bagan), Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar (Batang Lupar), Chew Mei Fun (Petaling Jaya Utara) and Bung Moktar Radin (Kinabatangan).

Even new MPs like Datuk Mohd Sarit Yusoh (Temerloh), Shaziman Abu Mansor (Tampin) and Mah Siew Kong (Teluk Intan) are playing an active role in daily sittings. They deserve praise for their active participation.

For those who have a poor track record - and people are keeping tabs on them - they have been warned.

Jamaluddin said MPs who had official functions or party meetings to attend could be excused, provided they obtained prior permission.

But, said Jamaluddin who is MP for Rompin, these must not be at the expense of their responsibilities in Parliament.

Well, the BN MPs have been warned, but what about the Opposition MPs who now number 45.

Datuk Ruhanie Ahmad, MP for Parit Sulong, said not all Opposition MPs serve the rakyat for there are among them who are not always present during sittings and and neither are all of them active.

"But we (Barisan MPs) must make sure that we are all present so the Opposition cannot capitalise on the issue of no quorum in the House," he said.

The quorum for the Dewan Rakyat is 26 and the Opposition MPs have been known to raise the "no quorum in the House" point during sittings resulting in the Speaker or Deputy Speaker ringing the bell to summon those MPs loitering along the corridors.

And what about the Opposition MPs? Mahfuz Omar (Pas-Pokok Sena) said his party had a Parliament Secretariat which keeps tabs on their MPs. The secretariat monitors attendance and notes how active they were in the Dewan Rakyat.

"How many times we debated any Bill, and how many times we asked questions during the question and answer session or during a debate are also monitored," Mahfuz said.

"During our Supreme Council meeting, this attendance register would be produced and our participation will also be discussed."

This shows that the Opposition is also monitoring its MPs.

Does it imply that the performance of the Opposition MPs in the House would also determine if they would be fielded in the next general election?

Well, that is yet to be determined.

In the case of Barisan MPs, they have already been warned that their parties and the public as well would be monitoring them.

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